

9 dead as storm Harvey continues its rampage across Texas

HOUSTON, AUG 29 /--/ Tropical storm Harvey continued to batter southeast Texas today with rain and floods, leaving at least nine people dead and devastating highways, houses and entire neighbourhoods in the US fourth-largest city here. First responders took to boats to rescue stranded residents, with authorities warning that more than 30,000 people across the region could be forced from their homes by the time skies are expected to clear later this week. A family of six is believed to have died after drowning in a white van while trying to escape the floods. The passengers included four children. The driver reportedly called out to them to try to get out through the back door, but they were unable to escape. Witnesses said first responders were in the area, but were unable to rescue the passengers. It is thus far the single deadliest incident resulting from the storm.

Trump defends pardoning former Sheriff of Arizona

WASHINGTON, AUG 29 /--/ US President Donald Trump has defended his controversial pardon of former Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio calling him a "patriot" and alleged that the previous presidents, including Barack Obama, have pardoned "criminals". Arpaio was convicted of criminal contempt last month for ignoring a court order in a racial profiling case. He has been accused for years of violating basic human rights in his prisons, but Trump insisted yesterday that he was no worse than Americans who had been granted clemency by previous presidents.

"Sheriff Joe is a patriot. Sheriff Joe loves our country. Sheriff Joe protected our borders. And Sheriff Joe was very unfairly treated by the Obama administration, especially right before an election - an election that he would have won." "So I stand by my pardon of Sheriff Joe and the people of Arizona, who really know him best, would agree with me," Trump said. If you look at, as an example, President Clinton pardoned Marc Rich, who was charged with crimes going back decades, including illegally buying oil from Iran while it held 53 American hostages - was not allowed to do that, selling to the enemies of the United States, he alleged. He was pardoned after his wife donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Clintons, Trump alleged. "Then you have dangerous criminals." President Clinton pardoned Susan Rosenberg, a member of the Weather Underground, charged as part of a bank robbery that led to a guard and two police officers being killed. President Clinton commuted the sentence of Carlos Vignali, a central player in a cocaine ring that stretched from California to Minnesota, he alleged. "President Obama commuted the sentence of Chelsea Manning, who leaked countless sensitive and classified documents to WikiLeaks, perhaps and others. But a horrible, horrible thing that he did. Commuted the sentence and perhaps pardoned," he said. Obama also commuted the sentence of Oscar Lopez Rivera, who was charged as part of a violent independence group from Puerto Rico, responsible for 28 Chicago-area bombings and many deaths in the 1970s and 1980s, Trump alleged responding to a question on why he pardoned Sheriff Joe, for which he has been widely criticised. (PTI)

Rockport, near where Harvey made landfall. A 52-year-old homeless man was found in La Marque, a small city near Galveston. Non-stop rain yesterday crippled Houston and emergency teams aided by a growing contingent of citizen-rescuers plunged into waist-deep water seeking people stranded by devastating, historic flooding in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. Two Indian students are in a critical condition after they nearly drowned in Lake Bryan in the US state of Texas. As the rain kept pouring, as many as 13 million people from Houston to New Orleans were under flood watches and warnings. Many residents climbed to the upper stories of their homes. Some even pitched tents on roofs, waiting it out until a boat or helicopter swooped in. "Harvey has in many ways turned southeast Texas into an inland lake...the size of Lake Michigan," said Brad Kieserman, vice president of disaster operations and logistics for the American Red Cross. According to the National Weather Service (NWS), residents can expect another 24 inches of rain, the

return of tropical storm force winds and high flood waters. The NWS has issued flood watches and warnings from near San Antonio to New Orleans, an area that is home to more than 13 million people. Schools, airports and office buildings remained closed. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said that there are already 5,500 people in shelters and that number is expected to rise. Harvey's onslaught is predicted to continue for the next few days, as the storm swirls around the southeastern US coast, briefly heads offshore and then makes another landfall. Texas Governor Greg Abbott activated his state's entire National Guard, deploying 12,000 service members to respond to the devastation. In addition, 16 aircraft are conducting day and night wide area search and rescue missions along the Texas coast from Corpus Christi to Houston. Texas is at the early stages of turning back on power restoration of power is one of its biggest needs. Desperate residents have taken to social media to plead for help, posting images of their families stranded

at home as flood waters quickly rise. President Donald Trump yesterday declared emergency conditions in Louisiana, where forecasts have called for as much as two feet of rainfall in some areas. He pledged swift action by the federal government to provide relief to states affected by Harvey, and he is scheduled to visit Texas. "Recovery will be a long and difficult road, and the federal government stands ready, willing and able to assist in that effort," he said. The immediate focus for many remained Houston, the country's fourth-largest city and a sprawling metropolitan area, which faced dire circumstances and National Weather Service forecasts warning of more heavy rainfall. Two reservoirs were opened to release water to relieve the stress the downpour has caused in the region, which has seen as much rain in a few days as it averages in an entire year.

Parts of Harris County, which encompasses Houston, were pelted with 30 inches of rain in the past 72 hours, the Weather Service reported early Monday. The Weather Service said Harvey's rain is causing "catastrophic and life-threatening flooding over large portions of southeastern Texas". Officials said Houston, a major center for the nation's energy industry, had suffered billions of dollars in damage and would take years to fully recover. Oil and gas companies have shut down about a quarter of their production in the Gulf of Mexico. Spot prices for gasoline are expected to jump, but the full extent of damage will not be clear for days, companies and experts said. More than 100,000 Indian-Americans living in and around Houston area have also been badly hit by the monstrous hurricane Harvey. The community members living in and around Houston have either voluntarily abandoned their homes or have been evacuated to safer places, after flood water dangerously entered their homes, in a few cases touching the roof. Hundreds of Indian students, who were stranded in their homes and ran out of food, are being helped by the Indian Consulate in Houston. (PTI)

N Korea fires missile over Japan in aggressive test

SEOUL, AUG 29 /--/ North Korea fired a ballistic missile from its capital Pyongyang that flew over Japan before plunging into the northern Pacific Ocean, officials said today, an aggressive test-flight over the territory of a close US ally that sends a clear message of defiance as Washington and Seoul conduct war games nearby. Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile traveled around 2,700 kilometers (1,677 miles) and reached a maximum height of 550 kilometers (341 miles) as it flew over the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. The launch appeared to be the first of a North Korea missile to cross over Japan, though some rockets it said were used to put satellites into space have done so. It also appeared to be the North's longest-ever missile test, but South Korea officials couldn't immediately confirm.

Each new test puts the North a step closer toward its goal of arsenal of nuclear missiles that could reliably target the United States. The North has launched an unusually fast pace this year, and some analysts believe the North could have viable long-range nuclear missiles before the end of President Donald Trump's first term in early 2021. The South Korean military said it is analysing the launch from the United States and has strengthened its monitoring and preparation in case of further actions from North Korea. Analysts speculate the North may have tested a new intermediate-range missile that Pyongyang recently threatened to fire toward the US territory of Guam, which hosts a major military base.

This missile landed nowhere near Guam, which is about 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles) south of Tokyo, but the length of its flight path may have been designed for the North to show it could follow through on its threat. Seoul says the missile was launched from Sunan, which is where Pyongyang's international airport is, opening the possibility that North Korea launched a road-mobile missile from an airport runway. It was North Korea's 13th ballistic missile test this year, which analysts say is a spokesman of Seoul's JCS. The JCS said it was the first time North Korea fired a ballistic missile from Sunan. North Korea will no doubt be watching the world's reaction to see if it can use today's flight over Japan as a precedent for future launches. Japanese officials said there was no damage to ships or anything else reported. Japan's NHK TV said the missile separated into three parts.

"We will do our utmost to protect people's lives," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters. "This reckless act of launching a missile that flies over our country is an unprecedented, serious and important threat." Today's launch comes days after the North fired what was assessed as three short-range ballistic missiles into the sea and a month after its second flight test of an intercontinental ballistic missile, which analysts say could reach deep into the US mainland when perfected. South Korea's Foreign Ministry warned that the North will face a "strong response" from the US-South Korean alliance if what it called nuclear and missile provocations continue. The ministry also urged Pyongyang to accept talks over its nuclear programme and acknowledge that abandoning its nuclear ambitions is the only way to guarantee its security and economic development.

In a rare move, South Korea's military released footage of its own missile tests it says were conducted last week. The videos showed two types of new missiles with ranges of 800 kilometers (497 miles) and 500 kilometers (310 miles) being fired from truck-mounted launchers during three tests conducted on August 24. South Korea's Agency for Defense Development said the launches represented the last flight test for the longer-range missile before it is operationally deployed. Such missiles, which would be latest additions to South Korea's Hyunmoo family of missiles, are considered key components to the so-called "kill chain" pre-emptive strike capability the South is pursuing to cope with the North's growing nuclear and missile threat. South Korea also said its air force also conducted a live-fire drill involving four F-15 fighters dropping eight MK-84 bombs that accurately hit targets at a military field near the country's eastern coast.

Japan PM, Trump agree to hike pressure on N Korea: Abe

TOKYO, AUG 29 /--/ Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said today that he and US President Donald Trump agreed to hike pressure on North Korea after it launched a ballistic missile over Japan, in Pyongyang's most serious provocation in years. "We must immediately hold an emergency meeting at the United Nations to strengthen pressure against North Korea," Abe told reporters after a 40-minute phone call with Trump. "Increasing pressure - Japan and the United States are in complete agreement about this." Abe added, without elaborating on proposed measures, that he and the Trump who has been embroiled in an escalating war of words with Pyongyang over its weapons development - said Washington would stand by its ally Japan.

President Trump made a very strong commitment that the United States is with Japan 100 percent," Abe quoted Trump as saying. "We will cooperate among Japan, the US and South Korea.

We will also reach out to China, Russia and the international community to apply strong pressure on North Korea to change their policy." Last week, Japan said it would impose fresh sanctions on North Korea by freezing the assets of Chinese and Namibian firms doing business with the nuclear-armed state. The move against a half dozen organisations and a couple of individuals comes days after Washington expanded its own punitive measures against Chinese and Russian firms, as well as people linked to Pyongyang over its weapons development. The sanctions are aimed at disrupting the flow of cash funding North Korean weapons programmes, which are in violation of United Nations resolutions. (AFP)



Israel soldiers work on laptops as they take part in a cyber security training course, called a Hackathon, at INT Institute of Technology and Innovation, at a high-tech park in BeerSheva, southern Israel - REUTERS

Two militants killed in Kyrgyzstan shootout with police

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Aug 29 /--/ Kyrgyzstan said today that two militants were killed and one was injured in a shootout with police who also claimed to have foiled a terror plot in the Central Asian country. Kyrgyzstan's State National Security Service (GKNB) claimed its officers killed two members of an "armed terrorist group" that had planned attacks ahead of the former Soviet Republic's independence day. One accomplice of the pair was hospitalized in the clash, while another suspected plotter had been detained

the day before, the GKNB said in a statement. The same group had threatened traffic police with a pistol and a grenade after being pulled over for a routine inspection last week before driving off, the GKNB said. In photos released by the security service, two corpses appear to be lying in a field along with a knife and a firearm. The GKNB said the group was planning attacks in the capital Bishkek and surrounding region using "homemade explosives" during the independence holiday beginning August 31. Authorities in

Kyrgyzstan, a landlocked majority-Muslim country of six million people, regularly claim to have foiled terror plots without offering convincing evidence. Although the country has seen relatively few terrorist incidents in its 26 years of independence an apparent suicide attack targeting China's embassy in the country set alarm bells ringing in August last year. At least three people were wounded when a vehicle driven by a suicide bomber exploded after ramming through a gate at the embassy in the capital Bishkek. (AFP)

14 killed as bus, pick-up truck collide in Egypt

CAIRO, AUG 29 /--/ At least 14 people were killed and 42 others injured today when a bus and a pick-up truck collided after plunging from a bridge onto the road below in southern Egypt, officials said. The Health Ministry said in a statement that the accident took place on a main road linking Beni Suef with the capital, Cairo.

The driver of the pick-up truck, which was carrying poultry, told local media that he fell with his vehicle from the bridge but managed to get out of the vehicle, then the bus fell over his vehicle. The driver is currently being treated in a hospital.

The bus, which was travelling from Cairo to the Upper Egyptian city of Menya, was carrying 62 passengers. Hospital sources said that some of the injured are in a serious condition. Egypt has one of the world's highest accident rates owing to careless driving and poor road and vehicle conditions. The World Health Organisation (WHO) ranks Egypt as the world's tenth worst country in road accidents, after India, China and the US. (PTI)

Macron says fighting 'Islamist terror' his top priority

PARIS, AUG 29 /--/ Fighting "Islamist terrorism" is France's top priority, President Emmanuel Macron said today in a key foreign policy speech. "Providing security for our citizens means that the fight against Islamist terrorism is our first priority," he told some 200 French ambassadors gathered in Paris. Since early 2015, France has suffered a series of terror attacks that have claimed more than 230 lives, making it the worst-affected country in western Europe. "There's no place for naivete, nor for fear of Islam which confuses Islamism and Islamic," he said, calling assuring the security of the French the "raison d'etre" of the country's diplomatic efforts. Macron announced the organisation of a conference on staunching the sources of funding for terror groups, to be held in

Paris in early 2018. He also argued against taking sides in the regional power battle between Iran, a majority Shiite Muslim country, and Saudi Arabia, a Sunni power. "Some have chosen their camp. It's a mistake. The strength of our diplomacy is to speak to all sides," he said. The 39-year-old leader also insisted there was no alternative to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, which has been fiercely opposed by US President Donald Trump. "There is no alternative to the non-proliferation agenda. It enables a constructive and demanding relationship with Iran," he said. Facing dismal approval ratings less than four months into his term, Macron was looking to burnish his foreign policy credentials with the speech, which is a fixture on France's political calendar. France's youngest ever president



has shown determination to restore what he sees as the country's declining international prestige under his predecessor, the Socialist Francois Hollande. He has won kudos for making a bold start on the international stage, hosting both Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin within his first weeks in office. He raised human rights with Putin and spoke out against Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris accord on fighting climate change.